

Message Text

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ACTION SS-14

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4243

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DEPT FOR S/S, NEA AND SY ONLY FROM MACK AND HOUGHTON

E. O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: OTRA LE CY

SUBJECT: MISSION LAUNCHED (A SLOW BOAT TO JOUNIEH)

1. HOUGHTON AND MACK ARRIVED IN LARNACA THE EVENING OF AUGUST 19. THEY SPENT THE NIGHT IN NICOSIA WITH SPECIAL AGENTS MULVEY AND FRATODDI, INTENDING TO RETURN TO LARNACA ON AUGUST 20 TO BOARD THE "DONA PILLA" FOR A SCHEDULED 12-HOUR TRIP TO JOUNIEH. INFORMED THAT THE SCHEDULED DEPARTURE TIME HAD SLIPPED BECAUSE OF HIGH SEAS, THE PARTY DID NOT LEAVE FOR LEBANON UNTIL APPROXIMATELY 1500. ON ARRIVAL, THEY WERE TOLD THAT THE "DONA PILLA" HAD BLUNDERED INTO TURKISH-CONTROLLED WATERS WHERE IT HAD BEEN SEIZED.

2. WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF THE CYPRIOT AUTHORITIES, PLACES WERE OBTAINED ON THE NEXT OUTBOUND SHIP, THE "ESPACE." AFTER THE PARTY HAD BOARDED, THE ADJACENT SHIP TO WHICH THE "ESPACE" WAS TIED DEVELOPED A FIRE IN THE ENGINE AND BEGAN BELCHING SPARKS FROM ITS SMOKE STACK. THE PORT'S FIRE-FIGHTING UNIT PROMPTLY QUENCHED THE BLAZE WHILE OUR PARTY EXPRESSED SATISFACTION THAT THEY WERE SAFE ABOARD THE "ESPACE" RATHER THAN A LESS TRUSTWORTHY VESSEL. LITTLE DID THEY KNOW*

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3. THE "ESPACE" CHUGGED AWAY INTO THE NIGHT AT 2130 WITH A SCHEDULED TRAVEL TIME OF FIFTEEN HOURS. IT WAS A WARM NIGHT WITH ROUGH SEAS. THE REPORTING OFFICER, WHO READILY ADMITS THAT HE IS NO SAILOR, SPENT MOST OF THE NIGHT BELOW DECKS WHERE, ALTHOUGH EVEN WARMER THE PITCH AND ROLL WERE SOMEWHAT LESS.

4. THE "ESPACE" WAS BUILT IN 1921, A NEWER SHIP, IT SHOULD BE NOTED, THAN THE TITANIC. ITS CREW, CONSISTING OF A FRENCH CAPTAIN, TWO LEBANESE SAILORS AND A GREEK PURSER, WERE CHARMINGLY REIMINISCENT OF A 1940 VINTAGE FILM WITH HUMPHREY BOGART AND DISNEY GREENSTREET. THE "ESPACE" BEGAN ITS CAREER AS AN ICEBREAKER AND HAS ONLY RECENTLY ENTERED THE JOUNIEH-LARNACA PASSENGER TRADE. ITS POPULARITY IS INDICATED BY THE FACT THAT THE ONLY PASSENGERS OTHER THAN OUR PARTY OF FOUR WERE THREE LEBANESE WHO FOR ONE REASON OR ANOTHER WERE DESPARATE TO RETURN HOME. PROVISIONS WERE ON THE HOUSE AND CONSISTED OF CHICKEN SANDWICHES, WHICH APPEARED AT LEAST A WEEK OLD, WARM COCA COLA AND EQUALLY WARM SEVEN-UP. ONE OF THE HUNGRIER LEBANESE PASSENGERS HAD A SANDWICH AND PROMPTLY DEVELOPED A SHARP ABDOMINAL PAID, WHICH, ALTHOUGH IT ABATED IN REASONABLY SHORT TIME, SERVED AS A WARNING FOR THE REST OF US. IF THERE WAS A CAPTAIN'S TABLE, NOBODY WAS INVITED.

5. THE "ESPACE" PUFFED INTO THE PORT OF JOUNIEH AND CRASHED LOUDLY INTO THE DOCK AT 1815 ON AUGUST 21, NEARLY 21 HOURS AFTER IT HAD LEFT LARNACA. WE GRATEFULLY DIS-EMBARKE TO THE DUST AND CLAMOR OF THE JOUNIEH QUAYSIDE.

6. RECOMMENDATION: IF SENIOR OFFICIALS SHOW ANY INTEREST IN TRAVEL TO JOUNIEH, THE DEPARTMENT SHOULD EXPLORE ALTERNATE MODES OF TRANSPORT.
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